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UNITED STATES
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ROSA L. DELAURO

3RD DISTRICT, CONNECTICUT

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AGRICULTURE, RURAL DEVELOPMENT,
FOOD AND DRUG ADMINISTRATION,
AND RELATED AGENCIES

COMMITTEE ON THE BUDGET

March 11, 2020

The Honorable Betsy DeVos
Secretary of Education
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20202

Dear Secretary DeVos:

As the United States experiences more confirmed cases of the novel Coronavirus (COVID-19), health officials are taking steps to prevent the spread of the virus in local communities. Currently, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) expects more cases to arise as the weeks progress and our community institutions seek to develop contingency plans to respond.

Schools are a fundamental aspect of communities nationwide. Administrators and teachers across the country are looking to the Department of Education for guidance on how to respond to this infectious disease. Current plans seek to build on everyday practices (e.g., encouraging hand hygiene, monitoring absenteeism, communicating routinely) that include strategies for before, during, and after a possible outbreak. But, with the CDC recommending social distancing as one of their precautions, our schools are preparing for closures and the potential of remote learning.

During your testimony before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies on February 26, 2020, you announced the creation of a task force on COVID-19, and the Department currently has a webpage dedicated to providing information and resources. Yet, the plans on the current task force website leave out an important population of students: those living with disabilities. According to *The Condition of Education 2019* report, 7 million, or 14 percent, of all public-school students ages 3–21 received special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Among students receiving special education services, 34 percent had specific learning disabilities.

In a previous statement, you mentioned that officials are working on updating the 2009 guidance on the needs of students with disabilities during H1N1 virus (i.e., the swine flu). I would urge you to consider the more pertinent consequences of COVID-19 compared to H1N1 virus on the education system; back then, hundreds of schools closed for two weeks. With COVID-19, we can expect tens of thousands of K-12 schools to close for a longer duration of time.

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While overall questions remain on the role and responsibilities of the task force, I would like to better understand specifically what is being done to assist children with disabilities, their families and teachers. What guidance is the Department of Education giving to local education agencies in response to COVID-19, specifically for families with children with disabilities?

- a. In addition to the website, what methods will the Department use to communicate with these families to ensure they are getting the resources that they need?
 - b. How will you address access to remote learning opportunities for families with children with disabilities, including those living in low-income communities with limited personal and school-related resources?
2. What guidance is the Department of Education giving to teachers who will potentially need to teach their students with disabilities through the method of remote learning?
- a. How frequently will the Department communicate with administrators, teachers, and school staff to address their questions and continued guidance for remote learning?
 - b. How will you troubleshoot your plan if remote learning is not creating an equal opportunity to education, and if teachers find that student performance is suffering from remote learning methods?

Sincerely,

Rosa L. DeLauro
Member of Congress